

Freudian Psychoanalysis Towards an Ethics of Finitude

Authors : Katya E. Manalastas

Abstract : This thesis is a dialogue with Freud about vulnerability and any forms of transience we encounter in life. This study argues that Freud's Ethics of Finitude, which is framed within the psychoanalytic context, is a critical theory about how human beings fail to become what they are because of their attachment to their illusions—to their visions of perfection and immortality. Freud's Ethics of Finitude positions itself between our detachment to ideals and recognition of our own death through our loved one. His texts portray the predicament of the finite individual who suffers from feelings of guilt and anxiety because of his failure to live up to the demands of his idealistic civilized society. The civilized society has overestimated men's susceptibility to culture. It imposes excessive sublimation, conformity to rigid moral ideals, and instinctive repression to manage human aggression. However, by doing this, civilization becomes a main source of men's suffering. The lack of instinctive freedom will result in a community of tamed but unhappy people. Civilization has also constructed theories and measures to rule out death and pain from the realities of life. Therefore, a man lives his life repressing his instincts and ignorant of his own mortality. For Freud, war and neurosis are just few of the consequences of a civilization that imprisons the individual from cultural hypocrisy instead of giving more play to truthfulness. The occurrence of Great War destroyed our pride in the attainments of civilization and let loose the hostile impulses within us which we thought had been totally eradicated by means of instinctive repression and sublimation. War destroyed most of the things that we had loved and showed us the impermanence of all the things that we had deemed perfect and everlasting. This chaotic event also revealed the damaging impact of our attachment to past values that no longer bind us; our futile attempts to escape suffering; and our refusal to confront the painfulness of loss and mourning. With this given backdrop, this study launches Freud's Ethics of Finitude—which culminates not in the submission of an individual to the unquestioned authority nor in the blind optimism and love for illusory happiness but in the pedagogy of mourning which brings forth the authentic education of man towards the truth about himself. His Ethics of Finitude is a form of labor in and through which the individual steps out of the realm of illusions and ideals that hinder him to confront his imperfections and accept the difficulties of existence. Through his analysis of the Great War, Freud seeks to awaken in us our ability to evaluate the way we see ourselves and to live our lives with death in mind. His Ethics of Finitude leads us to the fulfillment of our first duty as a living being, which is to endure life. We can only endure life if we are prepared to die and let go.

Keywords : critical theory, ethics of finitude, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud

Conference Title : ICPTSF 2023 : International Conference on Psychoanalytic Theory and Sigmund Freud

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : December 04-05, 2023